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STATE FOR AF, NEA/MAG AND AF/RSA
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [KPKO](#) [XA](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCAN RELATIONS WITH SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN
COUNTRIES: A SURVEY

REF: RABAT 0469 (NOTAL)

Classified By: DCM Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Morocco is very much an African country. Its foreign policy toward Sub-Saharan African countries, like its worldwide foreign policy, is dominated by a single issue: promoting its sovereignty over Western Sahara. The Western Sahara issue, in parallel with the broader rivalry between Morocco and its North African neighbor, Algeria, has shaped a "for us or against us" perspective, resulting in strong bilateral relationships with countries supporting the Government of Morocco (GOM)'s Sahara claims and weak, or even antagonistic, relations with countries that support the POLISARIO or recognize the so-called Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The positive side of this classic carrot-and-stick diplomacy has tried to win over countries to the GOM cause with assistance, sometimes military, and even outright bribery. Morocco also has mobilized its private sector entities in this effort, particularly parastatals. The stick side has ignored or worked against countries that disagree. Morocco withdrew from the African Union (AU) in 1984, when the AU admitted the SADR. It engages with Africa multilaterally through the UN, to which Morocco contributes more than a thousand peacekeepers in Africa. Beyond the Western Sahara issue, Morocco's Africa policy is shaped by the problem combating of illicit migration, in partnership with its European neighbors. The Moroccan MFA is floating a nascent idea for a "South Atlantic Security Organization" to counter smuggling and trafficking between Latin American and West African countries. In addition to political ties, Morocco has some ongoing economic links and benefits from significant religious and cultural ties to several African countries. This survey focuses on Moroccan relations with Sub-Saharan Africa outside the Maghreb. End Summary.

African Identity and Commitment

¶2. (U) Broadly, Morocco is strongly and publicly committed to its African identity, along with its Arab, Mediterranean, and to a lesser extent, Atlantic identities. Historic trade and religious ties go back millennia. Large numbers of Africans migrated to Morocco, many as slaves, and became integrated into both blood and culture, part of the unspoken and little-appreciated Moroccan mosaic. One of the characteristic forms of Moroccan music, Gnawa, is of Sub-Saharan origin. More recently, sporting ties such as the soccer African Cup of Nations, engrave that association into modern popular consciousness.

Carrots for Morocco's Supporters

¶3. (SBU) For Sub-Saharan African states, the recognition of Morocco's sovereignty in the Western Sahara, or abstaining from taking a position on the issue, is the litmus test on which relations are evaluated. Changes, which in recent years have been almost invariably in favor of the Moroccan position, often result from direct engagement by Morocco and are generally a precondition for assistance, investment and support. Modest by international standards, Morocco has extended a hand to assist countries whose foreign policy is aligned with Morocco's; this assistance has had both bilateral and regional implications. In the past year, Moroccan King Mohammed VI established the Alaouite Foundation for Sustainable Development, a fund directed toward projects on the African continent and also intended as a political tool. Furthermore, Morocco has given direct payments to

foreign government officials in exchange for their support on Western Sahara, though we have not heard of these recently.

¶4. (SBU) Within the last few years, Morocco sent military supplies to the Seychelles that were then forwarded to the Comoros. Once received by the Comoros, the equipment was used to expel rebels from an outlying island. The details of this transaction became public after the Comoros thanked the GOM on the margins of the last Arab Summit in Damascus, Syria in April of this year for the support. About the same time, the Seychelles withdrew its recognition of the SADR.

¶5. (SBU) Senegal's support for Morocco has resulted in significant bilateral assistance from Morocco. The GOM has assisted Senegal with de-mining in the southern, Casamance region of the country. Likewise, Morocco endorsed and supported Senegal's hosting the March 2008 Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

¶6. (SBU) For the inauguration of the President of Guinea-Bissau, Morocco flew down supplies for the reception for 500, including the tents, tables, chairs, flowers and food. Likewise, when the Liberian soccer team ran into visa issues ahead of attending training in Germany, the GOM stepped in to offer assistance. In May 2008, the Liberian national team trained for ten days in Morocco at the GOM's invitation.

¶7. (SBU) Moroccan support for countries supporting its sovereignty over Western Sahara was also evident when Zaire's former president Mobuto's partisans found refuge in Morocco as the government collapsed. Even today, Congolese remain a significant percentage of asylum seekers in Morocco.

¶8. (SBU) The creation of the Alaouite Foundation for Sustainable Development, recently formed and still in its initial stages of development, was announced by King Mohammed VI at the dedication of an optometry clinic built near Dakar, Senegal from funds provided by the monarchy. The Alaouite Foundation anticipates undertaking additional development and humanitarian assistance projects in Niger, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire, all countries friendly to Morocco's Sahara cause.

¶9. (U) In February, 2002, King Mohammed VI brought together the heads of states of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea to

reactivate the Mano River Union (MRU) -- a Western African grouping of countries begun in the 1970s to focus on economic and security development. Though the MRU had been active in the 1980s, strife among the three nations stifled diplomatic progress and the organization declined. In May 2008, the three countries, along with Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire, signed an agreement to control their borders and cooperate in development issues.

¶10. (C) It should be noted that Algeria, which is far wealthier, has tried to outbid Morocco, but it has been regularly outclassed by deft Moroccan diplomacy. One exception is South Africa. In the Apartheid era, the African National Congress received significant support from the GOM, but in 2004 moved to support the SADR, in return, some allege, for significant Algerian financial incentives.

Sticks to Dissenters -----

¶11. (SBU) A review of the countries supporting the SADR reveals the legacy of the Cold War as Algeria's supporters provided recognition and legitimacy to the SADR. Likewise,

glancing at the African countries that diplomatically supported the SADR in the past but have terminated their support and/or are now supporting the GOM position is reflective of their maturing process away from populist nationalism that dominated Africa at independence. Though there are a few exceptions, the recognition of the SADR by an African nation generally results in Morocco's diplomatic shunning of that country or active diplomacy against it.

¶12. (S) The GOM has long opposed the Government of Robert Mugabe in retaliation for Zimbabwe's support of Algeria and the POLISARIO, and has made clear its disapproval of Mugabe's current heavy-handed effort to remain in power (reftel). Recently, the GOM has extended diplomatic support to Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the Zimbabwean opposition Movement for Democratic Change in retaliation for Zimbabwe's support of Algeria and the POLISARIO.

¶13. (C) Tensions between South Africa and Morocco in recent years have risen and they have engaged in open squabbling, which escalated after a South African envoy went in April 2008 to Tifariti in the trans-berm buffer zone in the Western Sahara and pledged to help construct a sports facility there. Also, at the last United Nations Security Council debate on the Sahara, the South African Ambassador compared the Israeli treatment of Palestine to the Moroccan presence in the Sahara.

"Stuck in the Middle" Neutrality as a Response -----

¶14. (SBU) The Government of Niger, which has chosen to remain neutral and back the United Nations efforts in the Sahara, enjoys a relatively close relationship with Morocco. Fearing Algerian interference, particularly along their common border where Niger is currently engaged in a conflict with Tuareg rebels, Niger is hesitant to back Morocco's Saharan claims. Coping with this situation, the Nigerien government has resorted to playing Algeria and Morocco off of one another. Recently, wanting to increase military training in Morocco, Niger threatened to send forces to Algeria for training. Concerned about a potential loss of influence, Morocco added the additional training authorizations.

¶15. (SBU) Also choosing to stay neutral and back the United Nations efforts in the Sahara, Liberia enjoys a relatively close relationship with Morocco. Liberia ended its diplomatic recognition of the SADR and established its Embassy in Rabat in 1997 where its primary mission is to attract Moroccan investment to Liberia and encourage trade between the two countries. Liberian officials rate their success at encouraging business relationships as poor. However, Morocco is currently providing educational support to Liberia with over 50 Liberian students in Moroccan universities across the nation and in numerous programs of

study.

Self-Exile from African Union, But Not Africa

¶16. (SBU) Morocco remains the only country in Africa not participating in the AU. Stepping out of the Union in protest of the inclusion of the SADR has not lessened Morocco's commitment to peace on the African continent though. Morocco has historically been a contributor to United Nations peacekeeping efforts in Africa and publicly highlights its significant and generally positive contribution to UN peacekeeping. On May 29, 2008, the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, Morocco celebrated the 50th anniversary of its strategic partnership

in Africa with the United Nations. Morocco has participated in 15 United Nations peacekeeping operations on four continents and is currently the 12th largest contributor of forces to the United Nations in the world (sixth among African countries and second in the Arab world). It currently has over 1,500 peacekeepers deployed, most of them in Cote d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Operationally, these missions have apparently been quite successful. However, Moroccan peacekeeping contributions have been tarnished by allegations of sexual abuse of local women by the individual members of the contingent in the DRC.

(Note: The UN was not able to confirm allegations made in Cote d'Ivoire, although the GOM claims to have punished wrongdoers. End Note.)

¶17. (SBU) Morocco participated in the original UN peacekeeping mission in Somalia, but its involvement ended as the situation deteriorated. Recent AU involvement has been cited by the GOM as its reason for avoiding involvement. Furthermore, the GOM has avoided any engagement in Darfur, citing the significant AU role.

¶18. (SBU) Morocco has also engaged in attempts to resolve sub-regional conflicts within Africa, such as its role in developing the Mano River Union between Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. In an effort to further its position, Morocco is advancing an initiative to create a "South Atlantic Security" organization to counter smuggling and trafficking between Latin America and West Africa. Morocco's proposal would extend as far south as Equatorial Guinea and west to the island nation of Cape Verde.

Beyond the Political

¶19. (U) Morocco is also the beneficiary of a legacy of historical religious authority over several North African countries. Moroccan sovereignty over North Africa at one time extended into parts of present day Algeria, Mali and Mauritania with tribes ranging as far south as Senegal. The Moroccan King, who claims to be a descendant of the prophet Mohammed, enjoys some religious credibility as "Commander of the Faithful" with West African Muslims outside Morocco's borders. In 2007, the King hosted a conference of the Tariqa Tijania, a major Sufi Islamic movement that originated in Morocco and claims millions of adherents in West Africa.

¶20. (SBU) Only eight miles from Europe across the Strait of Gibraltar, Morocco is a land bridge for immigrants going from Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe and beyond. Partnering with the European Union, Morocco was recently granted 190 million euros partially to support countermeasures against illegal migration. Reports in the Moroccan media press recently claimed that as a result of Morocco's efforts, clandestine immigration, through Morocco, is down 91 percent from its rate three years ago. That reduction may be increasing the presence of frustrated migrants here.

¶21. (SBU) In addition, reflecting ties that developed over centuries during the trans-Saharan caravan trade in salt and gold, etc., Morocco has growing economic engagement with Sub-Saharan countries. Moroccans invest in banking,

telecommunications, and transportation, among other sectors. The GOM also funds training for other Africans in Moroccan universities, and the deployment of Moroccan technicians to African countries. One recent example was the 2006 deployment of Moroccan army de-miners to Senegal. Just in May 2008, Senegal signed a contract with Morocco's national electricity office for a concession for rural

electrification. The airline, Royal Air Maroc (RAM), is turning its home base of Casablanca into a regional hub for West Africa. Some of these ties are subsidized, and are likely to reinforce political concerns, particularly on Sahara. One likely example is the newly opened RAM air connection to Monrovia.

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